

Key Points

March 2003

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

- The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill).
- WHIP offers opportunities to landowners to improve and protect wildlife habitat on private and Tribal lands that comprise the majority of the land in the United States.
- The 2002 Farm Bill has expanded funding available to WHIP. The program provides additional tools for habitat protection, and places an even greater emphasis on establishing conservation practices that benefit habitat of threatened and endangered species.
- Since WHIP began in 1998, nearly 11,000 landowners have enrolled more than 1.6 million acres. Most efforts have concentrated on improving upland wildlife habitat, such as native prairie, but there is an increasing emphasis on riparian and aquatic habitat areas.
- WHIP provides cost-share payments to landowners under agreements that are usually 5 to 10 years in duration, depending upon the types of practices to be installed. There are shorter-term agreements for installation of practices needed to meet wildlife emergencies, as approved by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State conservationist.
- NRCS also enters into 15-year WHIP agreements that provide a higher level of cost-share assistance for participants who wish to undertake habitat development practices on essential plant and animal habitat. Up to 15 percent of available WHIP funding is available for 15-year agreements.
- Landowners may enroll privately owned land, Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or Tribal land, State and local government land on a limited basis, and Tribal land.
- Through WHIP, NRCS has developed partnerships and improved working relationships with Federal and State agencies, Tribal and local governments, conservation districts, and private organizations concerned with wildlife habitat development. NRCS encourages these partnerships through participation on the State Technical Committee and local work groups.
- Wildlife habitat resource needs are identified through a locally led process. Conservation districts convene local work groups to identify local wildlife habitat priorities. The local work groups provide input to the State Technical Committee, and the State conservationist works with the State Technical Committee to develop a State WHIP plan to address needs.
- A person may participate in WHIP if he or she owns or leases land, or can provide proof of control of the land for the agreement period.
- The Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill impacts eligibility for WHIP and several other 2002 Farm Bill programs. Individuals or entities that have an average

adjusted gross income exceeding \$2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceding the year the contract is approved are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations. The final rule for this provision has not yet been published.

- Land already enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, Wetlands Reserve Program, Water Bank Program, or Emergency Watershed Protection Program floodplain easement component is not eligible for WHIP. NRCS also may determine land is not eligible if on-site or off-site conditions might undermine the benefits of wildlife habitat development.
- WHIP is funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation.
- Species that have benefited from WHIP include the grasshopper sparrow, bobwhite quail, swift fox, short-eared owl, Karner-blue butterfly, gopher tortoise, Louisiana black bear, Eastern collared lizard, Bachman's sparrow, ovenbird, and acorn woodpecker.

- Through WHIP, NRCS helps landowners build and protect homes for the many creatures that make up our National heritage.

For More Information

If you need more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/>



Visit USDA on the Web at:
<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.